

VZCZCXYZ0023
PP RUEHWEB

DE RUEHVI #2639/01 2901345
ZNR UUUUU ZZH
P 171345Z OCT 07
FM AMEMBASSY VIENNA
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 8803
RUEKJCS/OSD WASHDC PRIORITY
RHEHAAA/WHITEHOUSE WASHDC PRIORITY

UNCLAS VIENNA 002639

SIPDIS

SIPDIS

DEPT FOR EUR/AGS, INR/EU, AND EUR/PPD FOR YVETTE SAINT-ANDRE

OSD FOR COMMANDER CHAFFEE

WHITEHOUSE FOR NSC/WEUROPE

E.O. 12958: N/A
TAGS: [OPRC](#) [KPAO](#) [AU](#)

SUBJECT: AUSTRIAN MEDIA HIGHLIGHTS: October 17, 2007

More Money for Asylum Cases

11. Austria is to significantly improve its handling of asylum cases, the government has said. Funds will be released to provide more staff to process applications for asylum, according to Finance Minister and Vice-Chancellor Wilhelm Molterer of the People's Party (OeVP). The coalition government has meanwhile set 2010 as the deadline for the backlog of cases to be cleared. "More German for immigrants," headlines semi-official daily Wiener Zeitung, reporting like all Austrian media on the ongoing asylum and immigration debate in Austria. Interior Minister Guenther Platter from the People's Party has suggested improving immigration by doubling to 600 the number of hours immigrants will be required to take German classes. Experts are warning, however, that such extended German courses would also result in increasing the financial burden on immigrants. In contrast, centrist daily Die Presse quotes experts as welcoming the Interior Minister's proposal as a "very sensible approach" and a "sensible development." The OeVP's coalition partner SPOe has meanwhile signaled cautious approval of Platter's plan. Floor leader for the Social Democrats Josef Cap said his party "would not say no categorically," but that their backing also depended on Minister Platter's concrete proposals.

Government Agreement on Online Searches

12. Following lengthy and tough negotiations, the SPOe-OeVP coalition government has reached agreement, which will allow Austrian police to conduct online searches on private computers under certain conditions. According to Interior Minister Guenther Platter from the OeVP, such searches would only be permissible in cases of suspicion of terrorist activities or severe crimes. A joint statement on the proposal will be presented in today's Council of Ministers. Independent provincial daily Salzburger Nachrichten, however, points out that Justice Minister Maria Berger from the SPOe has been "trying to slow down" efforts at permitting Austrian authorities to conduct online searches on private computers. She insists that such measures only be applied in the most severe of cases and if there is reasonable and probable cause, Berger told the daily. The Minister also said she does not understand the urgency with which her colleague Interior Minister Platter wants to push through the respective law. "The terrorist threat for Austria is not that imminent; a few weeks more or less won't matter," she argued.

Shakfeh to Step Down

13. The President of Austria's Islamic Community, Anas Shakfeh, has said he will not seek re-election. At an event on the occasion of the end of Ramadan, Shakfeh told Austrian President Heinz Fischer that he plans to retire in late 2008, after the end of his current term. Shakfeh has been the Islamic Community's President since 1999.

Semi-official daily Wiener Zeitung reports like several Austrian media that President of Austria's Islamic Community Anas Shakfeh has announced his retirement at the end of 2008. In a speech, Shakfeh said he had accomplished much during his term of office. In addition to the Islamic-Theological Faculty which is planned to open at the University of Vienna, he referred to the establishment of an Islamic cemetery, which will open soon. Also, a planned reform of the Islamic community envisages voting for representatives at all Austrian mosques said Shakfeh. He concluded that he would prefer a "younger" representative from the Islamic Community to succeed him.

Ambassador at Museum Dinner

14. US Ambassador to Austria Susan McCaw was among the guests attending a sponsors' dinner for the Vienna Museum of Fine Arts earlier this month, which was hosted by Museum Director Wilfried Seipel. Meanwhile, an Austrian tabloid publishes a portrait of the Ambassador, pointing out that Mrs. McCaw is "wrapping up" her ambassadorship in Austria. She has decided to return early to the US for "personal reasons," mass-circulation tabloid Oesterreich wrote on October 16.

Putin Backs Iran

15. Russian President Vladimir Putin, on a visit to Tehran, told the United States that Russia would not accept military action against Iran. An Austrian daily quotes the Russian leader as stressing: "We should not even think about using aggression in this region." Putin attended a meeting focusing on economic interests and geopolitical issues with other Caspian Sea states, who ruled out any strikes on Iran from their region.

Meeting with Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, Russian President Vladimir Putin underscored he supports Iran's right to a peaceful use of nuclear energy. On Monday, Putin also urged for more patience in the international dispute over Tehran's atomic program, independent provincial daily Salzburger Nachrichten writes. With Putin so massively backing Iran, Tehran is basking in the implications of the Kremlin bosses' visit. The trip is regarded as a "victory of Iranian diplomacy," and as proof that the United States' efforts at completely isolating Iran have failed dismally, the daily says. In truth, however, Putin's visit only serves to boost Russia's profile, both internationally and among states in the region, the Salzburger Nachrichten suggests.

Turkey Seeking Green Light on Iraq Incursion

16. Iraq has warned Turkey of the "grave consequences" of an incursion into northern Iraq to crush Kurdish rebels based there. The warning comes as the government in Ankara is seeking parliamentary approval today for a cross-border operation to pursue PKK members. However, Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan has underscored this does not mean an attack is imminent, but added that Ankara's "patience is wearing thin." According to Turkey, the PKK is a terrorist organization responsible for the deaths of at least 50 soldiers earlier this month.

"Turkey is increasing pressure on Iraq," liberal daily Der Standard headlines. According to the daily, the EU and the US have warned Ankara against taking action against Kurdish PKK rebels in Iraq, though. The Iraqi central government's problem in the matter is that it does not have the means to move against the PKK in the Kurdish-controlled north. Only the two Iraqi Kurdish leaders, Massud Barsani, the head of government of the autonomous region, and Jalal Talabani, the Iraqi President representing Kurdish interests in Baghdad, could accomplish that, says the Standard. Ankara, however, does not want to negotiate with either of them, and both Barsani and Talabani have so far ruled out taking action against the PKK. The daily believes that only the United States could change that: They and the Kurds in northern Iraq need to succeed in "keeping calm" the

PKK until mid-November, when Turkish Premier Erdogan meets with US President Bush in Washington. After that, the approach of winter will largely rule out active hostilities anyway, says the daily.

US President Meets Dalai Lama

[17](#). US President George Bush has met with the exiled Tibetan spiritual leader, the Dalai Lama, at the White House despite strong protests from the Chinese government. China regards the meeting as interference in its internal affairs, and has warned US-Chinese relations could deteriorate over this. White House spokesperson Dana Perino, however, underscored that the US President was not trying to provoke China.

When it comes to the Dalai Lama, China "sees red," mass-circulation provincial daily Kleine Zeitung says. That is why the Tibetan spiritual leaders' visit with US President George Bush could lead to serious tensions between the US and China. The fact that the US President has labeled the meeting a "private visit," does not help much: For the leadership in Beijing, the Dalai Lama remains a traitor and a proponent of Tibet's secession from China.

McCaw